

Teaching Reflective Thinking and Writing



Summer 2007 Writing Training

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Literacy--In a narrow sense, literacy is the ability of a student to use and understand language through reading and writing. However, the concept of literacy may also be defined very broadly. Literacy is the ability of a student to use language to communicate with others—through reading, writing, speaking, listening, observing and through the use of the combination of these skills.

Instructional Issues Q & A: Reflective Writing

Q: What is the purpose of the reflective entry in the portfolio?

A: The purpose of the reflective entry is for students to **analyze their growth as writers through the lens of literacy**. In a narrow sense, literacy is the ability of a student to use and understand language through reading and writing. However, the concept of literacy may also be defined very broadly. It is the ability of a student to use language to communicate with others—through reading, writing, speaking, listening, observing, inquiring, etc. as per the diagram on page 11 of the *Kentucky Writing Handbook*. Students who are able to make connections between writing development and literacy experiences are more likely to meet the “authentic (and insightful) focused purpose” called for in the writing criteria from the *Kentucky Writing Scoring Rubric*.

A piece of writing that does not make strong literacy connections would not (for that reason alone) render the portfolio incomplete. However, such a piece, most likely, does not meet the writing criteria under purpose, audience and idea development as strongly as a piece in which the student has made those connections.

Q: If a student’s reflective entry does not refer to reading, will the portfolio be considered “incomplete”?

A: The portfolio would not be considered incomplete for that reason alone. The better literacy connection(s) a student makes, however, the more likely he or she is to approach the “authentic (and insightful) focused purpose” called for on the rubric. Literacy may be defined more broadly than reading and writing if the student so chooses. See first question above.

Q: Is it appropriate in the reflective entry for a student to refer to all the pieces in his/her portfolio?

A: While referencing all the portfolio entries would not make a portfolio incomplete for that reason alone, it is **unlikely** that a student needs to reference each piece in his/her portfolio to analyze growth in writing through literacy. It may be more appropriate for students to reference a very limited number of entries (perhaps one if the focus in writing and literacy development has to do with that piece). It is also possible that students do not reference *any* particular piece in the portfolio at all. See *Kentucky Writing Handbook*, Chapter 11, Reflective Writing.

Q: Can a poem be included as the reflective piece?

A: No. A poem would not be an appropriate piece to include in this reflective category. While good poetry is certainly reflective, poetry is considered a literary genre, fulfills a literary purpose, and fits into the literary category.

The reflective entry in the portfolio is intended to be a transactive entry. It asks that students analyze growth in writing through literacy for **the transactive purpose** of informing an audience.

Examples may be found on page 81 of the *Kentucky Writing Handbook*, Part 1: Writing Development.

Q: How can I help students improve their reflective thinking and writing?

A: The key to good reflection is critical thinking. Therefore, regular practice helping students consider the literacy connection is necessary to build those reflective skills.

An excellent way for teachers to assist students with reflective thinking and writing is to **incorporate the use of the working folder into instruction**. The working folders are not intended to be stored away for the student to never see it. Students who are able to see their growth in writing over time through the pieces included in the working folder are much more likely to be able to reflect on their growth as writers. Regular practice reflecting on learning will help students to be able to think more analytically and reflectively (in any content area). Therefore, students who regularly work at reflection will be better able to show those skills in the writing assessment portfolio.

Q: I've had a problem with the reflective pieces from the past being "cookie cutter"—all of the pieces sound alike. How can I help the students develop reflective writing that is not "cookie cutter"?

A: First, no two reflective pieces should sound alike if the student is actually analyzing his/her **individual** growth in writing through literacy. Teachers may consider the reflective entry to be very much like other entries in the portfolio—students may all have the same or similar purposes in writing (analyze growth in writing through literacy); however, each student may focus the piece in a unique way. Consider the personal piece included in the portfolio. All students are analyzing the significance of an event or relationship, etc. However, they may all focus on something completely different. It is the difference in focus that makes the piece unique to the writer.

To help avoid "cookie cutter" pieces, teachers should help students brainstorm their own literacy experiences and help them focus the piece given the audience the student selects. Teachers should **avoid** having students list and refer to each piece in the portfolio. Likewise, teachers should avoid using a "checklist" of items to include in a reflective entry. Teachers should avoid having students all write in the same form, the same way. There is little ownership in that. We wouldn't expect the personal entries of two students to be alike; similarly, we would not expect two reflective entries to be alike. Each student's literacy experience is different.

Questions to Promote Reflective Thinking about Literacy

Directions: Teachers may use these questions (or some of the questions) at varying times to help students brainstorm how literacy experiences have influenced writing development. Teachers may choose to use these questions to promote writing to learn, or, they may decide to have students use their responses to questions within organizers to help them find a focus for the reflective entry. Under no circumstances should students be expected to answer all of the questions to incorporate into an entry. Focus is the key. Literacy strands are included in parentheses, but whatever the literacy connection, the student must make connections to writing development.

1. Do you remember ever having a favorite book? What was the title? What about the book made it your favorite? Can you see any connections between a favorite book and your growth as a writer? How did that book influence you?
(Reading/Writing connection)
2. Can you remember the title of the first book you ever read? How did this experience help you learn something? Why did you like the writing so much? Can you see any connections between this book and your growth as a writer? What are they? (reading/writing connection)
3. If you don't like to read books, is there something else you like to read? Magazines? Newspapers? Websites? Have you ever tried to write something similar? How did reading help influence your writing growth? (Reading/Writing connection)
4. Can you think of a school project (or a community project) that you were really proud of? Why were you proud of it? What did you have to read or write to be successful at the project? How did this influence your writing growth?
(Reading/Writing connection)
5. Have you ever had an experience where you had to speak in front of a group of people? What did you have to do to get ready to speak? How did you plan and think about your audience? How is thinking about your listener (when giving a speech) like thinking about your reader when you write something? Can you see any connections between this experience and your writing development?
(speaking/writing)
6. Did you ever play act like you were putting on a show? How did you figure out your lines? How do writers figure out what they are going to say when they write? Does this experience connect to your writing development in any way?
(speaking/writing)
7. Have you ever spoken to your mom or dad (or another person) to try to persuade them to do something or let you do something? How is this like persuading

someone through writing? Do you see any connection between this experience and your writing development? (speaking/writing)

8. Have you ever tried to explain something to someone and you were completely misunderstood? Were you ever able to get your audience to understand you? How is that like trying to get a reader to understand your writing? How have you worked to become more aware of the reader in your writing? (speaking/writing)
9. Do you believe you are ever persuaded to do something (or wear something or act a certain way) from watching a TV show or commercial? What was it? How is persuasion on TV like persuasion in writing? How do you try to persuade a reader in your writing? (observing/writing)
10. Are you a good listener? Have you ever had to listen carefully to someone to figure something out or to help them out in some way? What did you do to make sure you understood? How can you help readers understand something better through your writing just as you did in listening? (listening/writing)
11. Have you ever been really excited about something after listening to a speaker? Who was it? What was the speech about? How can you get someone excited about something through writing? How do you try to influence an audience through your writing? (listening/writing)
12. If you could choose anything to read about (school subject or otherwise), what would it be? Can you think about how getting to choose what you write is important like choosing what you read? When did you get to choose to write about a certain subject that you were really proud of? (reading/writing)

Teachers wishing to help students improve their reflection on literacy may consider the following characteristics that help students build toward strong reflection.

Reflection upon Literacy Growth (in different forms for different audiences)

Weaker

Stronger

Weaker reflective writing:	Stronger reflective writing:
<input type="checkbox"/> may simply list writing and reading experiences.	<input type="checkbox"/> demonstrates specific literacy experiences that show impact/growth in writing.
<input type="checkbox"/> may show little reflection, analysis or insight.	<input type="checkbox"/> demonstrates significance of literacy experiences through insightful analysis of learning events.
<input type="checkbox"/> may demonstrate little awareness of writing for a selected audience. Often, the only connection to the audience is included at the top of a letter—Dear _____.	<input type="checkbox"/> targets a specific audience and shows careful consideration of audience's needs to clearly communicate the purpose of the piece.
<input type="checkbox"/> demonstrates little idea development; writing may simply list pieces in the portfolio.	<input type="checkbox"/> demonstrates careful idea development and makes connections to literacy growth experiences.
<input type="checkbox"/> may demonstrate listings that are organized randomly (e.g., I learned this. . . I learned this. . .) with few or no connections.	<input type="checkbox"/> demonstrates clear organization with insightful connections through analysis and reflection.
<input type="checkbox"/> may narrate an experience for no other purpose than to narrate an experience.	<input type="checkbox"/> demonstrates narration of experience for the transactive purpose of analyzing growth in literacy to show impact on writing and learning.
<input type="checkbox"/> may be developed in a simple or illogical form.	<input type="checkbox"/> demonstrates careful choice of form given purpose and audience.
<input type="checkbox"/> may be "cookie cutter." Writing may seem "generic." All pieces in a class may sound similar.	<input type="checkbox"/> is individual to the student and his/her learning experiences.

Annotated
for Content
Only.

423 Rd.
K , KY
March 21, 2007

Dear Mrs.

I am writing this letter to tell you how much I enjoy coming to the library every day. Thank you for teaching me how to do research on the Internet. I enjoyed writing the animal article about baboons. I enjoy being in your class and love that you push me to read AR books. I think you will be proud to know that I have been the top reader all year in the fourth grade. My personal favorite is a fiction book called, Among the Free. It was about a third born child named Luke Garner trying to make all third born children free. In this book, mothers that have a third child must kill it. At Population Police Headquarters, (when they are free) Luke tells the whole country that he was a third born child and that third born children did not cause hunger. He reveals that the Population Police kept the food for themselves. I would like for you to encourage future fourth grade students to read this fascinating book. I thought I might share with you some of the wonderful features I noticed relating to this book.

One of the best features of Among the Free was the interesting way Margaret Haddix hooks me with a fantastic beginning. For example: "Luke hurry in!" cried my mother." Her hook or lead made me fear that Luke would be caught. I also wondered if he *would* be caught as an illegal third born child. In all of her exciting books she begins them with leads that build

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curiosity for me. They catch my attention to make me want to read the rest of the story and not put the book down.

I have used leads that are catchy in my stories just like Margaret Haddix. I usually start them out with an exclamatory sentence to get things heated up so my reader will want to read on. My personal narrative, "Open Sea," had an extremely gross but outstanding beginning. This made my reader want to read on. I think my readers will think that deep-sea fishing is sickening in the beginning, but in the end they will realize how much fun I had fishing.

Another interesting literary element Margaret Haddix used in Among the Free was dialogue. The exciting conversations made me feel like I was there. For example, "Haven't you heard? We've taken over the government!" yelled the man. "Really we're free?" I exclaimed." This conversation between the characters made me feel excited. Her dialogue made me read further and further. The superb dialogue she uses is awesome. It helped me understand the characters better. Dialogue makes her stories sound more believable.

I also used dialogue in some of my stories. Like Margaret Haddix, I tried to use intriguing dialogue. In my personal narrative, I used dialogue to make my story sound outstanding. Adding dialogue makes the story of my personal experience sound more interesting. It makes my reader feel like he or she is part of the conversation. This book helped me learn why dialogue is important. For example, when I was writing my story I wrote what Josh had said, "Dad, I have a big one! I

develops
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between literacy
skills (reading +
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literacy
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describes
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analysis of own decision { can't reel it in! HELP!!!” “Josh pull harder!” my uncle screamed. Without dialogue, my readers wouldn't be able to comprehend the real action-taking place in my narrative. *analysis reflection*

connection of reading Looking back over my fourth grade experience, my favorite activity was when I made a game out of “Among the Free.” To complete this project, I used a cardboard box to make the game board. Then I colored squares like a checkerboard. I wrote questions relating to the story and multiple-choice answers. Then I gathered up people to play the game. It didn't take long to complete this project. It only took about two hours because I memorized the book and knew the questions I was going to include in the game. The project was super easy because it didn't take long to think of some rules or to find the supplies for the game. By making the game, I improved my reading enormously and encouraged others to read it, too. I have read this book so many times I have it pictured in my mind like a movie.

analysis of strengths Mrs. , thank you for suggesting this book to me. It has helped improve my reading and writing skills. I think my greatest strength in writing now is coming up with good ideas for my stories. I know how to find and use better vocabulary in my stories to make them sound more exciting. My reading level has soared! This is because I have increased my reading level by three levels! I also have made all A's on my report card. By *voice* writing more detailed stories, I have had more proficient and distinguished scores on my open responses. Thank you again for suggesting I read this book! Remember to encourage your future fourth

support claims about self →

graders to read Among the Free. It is a remarkable and exciting book!

Your student,

Instructional Implications:

In order for the student to move forward instructionally in Content, more focus on insightful purpose needs to be addressed. The letter was somewhat formulaic, which did not lend the writer to have a in-depth understanding of the inner nature of the impact of reading the book to the development of his/her writing.

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can't reel it in! HELP!!!" "Josh pull harder!" my uncle screamed. Without dialogue, my readers wouldn't be able to comprehend the real action-taking place in my narrative.

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Mrs. , thank you for suggesting this book to me. It has helped improve my reading and writing skills. I think my greatest strength in writing now is coming up with good ideas for my stories. I know how to find and use better vocabulary in my stories to make them sound more exciting. My reading level has soared! This is because I have increased my reading level by three levels! I also have made all A's on my report card. By writing more detailed stories, I have had more proficient and distinguished scores on my open responses. Thank you again for suggesting I read this book! Remember to encourage your future fourth

graders to read Among the Free. It is a remarkable and exciting book!

Your student,

Annotated
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My Life in Writing

By

title
identifies
purpose

audience awareness
"This September, my football team and I had a football game in the Indianapolis Colt's Stadium." That's the lead of one of last year's pieces. One of this year's leads goes something like this. "You go deeper into the sparkling blue ocean water. You dunk your head to meet a big gray sea creature gliding right next to you." Yeah, you get the point. I've learned about catchy beginnings for my writing from second grade and further.

reading connection
analysis
voice
Good writing comes from good teaching. Good writing also comes from reading good books. One of the reasons I have improved in writing is that I read a book called The Report Card. It's about a girl who has a hard time with her writing grades. Then she buckles down and gets her writing done. It gives a great example of the beginning of a portfolio piece. It explained what happened, when it happened, and how it changed her. After reading this, I thought, "*I could write like that*," and I could. How about you? How did you get started in your writing?

reflection
supporting details
Teachers are good sources of information in writing too. The lesson my 4th grade teacher, Mrs. J. gave that helped me in writing the most was to prove it. This means that you need to give examples of what you write about. You need to tell what your experience is and explain

how you had it. For example tell what's involved, where it happened, when it happened, and how the situation got started. You need to show what's going on. Not just tell what's going on. This really helps in the process of writing a piece.

specific
details

Adding details (I'll admit) was one area I wasn't very good with. Details to me were just like getting ready for guests to visit my house. **NOT A BIG DEAL!!!** But that changed in the third grade, during my first conference to be precise. The first time Mrs. W saw my writing she said, "Child, you better buckle down and start adding some detail." My mind was then fixed on adding details. After that adding detail wasn't just a "no hustle" anymore. Actually, adding details in portfolio pieces was my #1 rule from then on. It wasn't easy, but now look at the good pieces I've written. Everything I've learned about writing is from parents and teachers.

Mc, being inspired to write? No way, well maybe just a little bit. Here's how the story goes. I was my dad's #1 fan. He was my favorite person in the whole world. So when I was struggling in writing, of course I went to him. But when I found out my dad really liked writing, I had to change my attitude about it. It was mostly because I wanted to be just like him. Yeah, I took his advice about adding more details and learned that writing can actually be pretty cool.

Editing helps me to find errors in my piece and helps to make it sound better. I have two ways to help me find mistakes in my writing. One, conference with a teacher. They can help you find mistakes easily. Two, have someone read my piece aloud. Hearing my piece read aloud sometimes helps me find mistakes that I wouldn't find reading it alone. When I hear my piece, man do I hear mistakes. Left and right they come at me. It's mistake mania! I remember the first time I had someone read a piece to me. I was very amazed by the mistakes I missed. From then on, I even sometimes read my own piece aloud while I'm working on it. That really helps me.

describes
own
strategies

reflection

Another way I enjoy writing is to write a letter to a friend. When writing in general, I like to add a lot of details. But when writing to a friend, the details would be what has happened, what is happening, and what will happen. I would make sure to use the "who, what, when, where, why, and how's." I like to add all of these when I'm writing to them because a lot of my friends are very far away in Washington State and I don't see them often. I really have to work to make it sound good.

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What's my favorite piece this year? That'll have to be my memoir. Not only because it brought back great memories but I learned new concepts about writing. Take brainstorming for example. First, we had to think of what we wanted to write about. Then, we had to think of when it happened, what's the relationship you had with it, those

describes
process

kinds of things. Thinking of these types of memories helped me put together a proficient piece.

reflection

I didn't write at all in kindergarten and first grades. So, I didn't get all the writing experience I needed. But when I did start writing, I actually thought it was pretty fun. I mean, it wasn't that bad. Things got a little harder in third grade. But I could handle it. Now, in the fourth grade, writing is more difficult. It's sometimes hard. We have longer pieces to write and we have to choose our own topic. I guess you could say it's not my favorite subject. The point is, the higher the grade levels, the harder the writing seems to be. You have to tell yourself you're going to get it over with. Then just jot your ideas down and put together your piece.

voice

I hope this piece has given you tips for writing. All you have to do is follow directions and always listen to your teacher for advice. That reminds me of the time.... never mind. Just follow these tips and you will be able to create a proficient piece. That's all the time we have for now, and remember, always listen to your teacher. They know best.

4/6/07

Instructional Implications:

Instruction should focus on maintaining a focused purpose throughout. Student tended to focus on the enjoyment of writing in a few places.

My Life in Writing

By

"This September, my football team and I had a football game in the Indianapolis Colt's Stadium." That's the lead of one of last year's pieces. One of this year's leads goes something like this. "You go deeper into the sparkling blue ocean water. You dunk your head to meet a big gray sea creature gliding right next to you." Yeah, you get the point. I've learned about catchy beginnings for my writing from second grade and further.

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Grade 4 Reflective Sample

March 22, 2007

Dear Mr. Stuart,

One of your first books that I read was *The Rightful Owner*. From then on, I was hooked and had to read four others. When I was younger, my sister used to tell me the story in the book she was reading. She told it in such colorful details that I couldn't wait until she read the next chapter, and then tell me about it. Now, I have learned to paint vivid pictures in my writing from the stories that she told, from reading books like *The Magic Tree House* books, and your books. In every book, I found out you used awesome vocabulary, dialogue, and you hooked me just like a fisherman hooks a fish. I love those books, because I feel like I'm part of the story. I'm so glad I have experienced your writing, because reading it has helped me to become a better writer.

Probably, one of the most important elements of extraordinary writing I've learned this year and from reading your books is how to hook a reader. When I read a book, I decide if I'm going to like it after reading the first page. If the author does a good job of "hooking" me, then I will want to read the rest of the book. I've always been hooked on reading your books because you have exceptional leads. In my memoir, "Peaches", I started my introduction by writing, "Sweet and cuddly. That's how I would describe the raccoon I once had." I think this lead will make a reader want to read on and find out about my pet raccoon, Peaches, because most people don't think of a raccoon as being sweet and cuddly.

The second element in your books that has helped me with my writing is learning the importance of using vivid vocabulary. For example, in my memoir, "Peaches", I described my pet raccoon's eyes by writing, "Her glowing green eyes make her look like a spy in the night." When I read *A Ride with Huey the Engineer*, you made me feel excited like Sunny must have felt. I even thought I could smell the freshly baked pie Sunny took Huey. I felt like I was on the train. After reading this book, I wish I could have ridden with Huey and Sunny. Since I have read stories with vivid vocabulary, I see how important it is to include more appealing vocabulary when I write. I want my reader to see the picture I am trying to paint, as well as, enjoy reading my stories.

Another way my writing has improved is by seeing your use of dialogue in your books. The reason dialogue makes your books intriguing is because I know who is talking and what they are saying. I like to hear someone read stories aloud with dialogue; because the reader can change his/her voice to imitate the characters. For instance, in your book *The Rightful Owner*, there are many conversations between the characters. In my memoir, "Peaches", I used dialogue when I wrote, "Look what I have!" to show the reader my dad's excitement when he brought a baby raccoon home. I used this dialogue so my readers would know exactly how my dad felt and feel like they were a part of my story.

My teacher has told our class that the more we read the better we will write. I didn't know what she meant at first, but now, I see that by reading admirable examples of outstanding writing, I have learned to write admirably. I used to be a good writer, but now I'm a fantastic writer. I try to use the elements of "hooking" the reader with dialogue, vivid vocabulary, and captivating leads. Thank you for sharing your writing talent with me.

Sincerely,

A Fan of Your Writing

March 22, 2007

Dear Mr. Stuart,

One of your first books that I read was *The Rightful Owner*. From then on, I was hooked and had to read four others. When I was younger, my sister used to tell me the story in the book she was reading. She told it in such colorful details that I couldn't wait until she read the next chapter, and then tell me about it. Now, I have learned to paint vivid pictures in my writing from the stories that she told, from reading books like *The Magic Tree House* books, and your books. In every book, I found out you used awesome vocabulary, dialogue, and you hooked me just like a fisherman hooks a fish. I love those books, because I feel like I'm part of the story. I'm so glad I have experienced your writing, because reading it has helped me to become a better writer.

authentic insight-ful purpose

Probably, one of the most important elements of extraordinary writing I've learned this year and from reading your books is how to hook a reader. When I read a book, I decide if I'm going to like it after reading the first page. If the author does a good job of "hooking" me, then I will want to read the rest of the book. I've always been hooked on reading your books because you have exceptional leads. In my memoir, "Peaches", I started my introduction by writing, "Sweet and cuddly. That's how I would describe the raccoon I once had." I think this lead will make a reader want to read on and find out about my pet raccoon, Peaches, because most people don't think of a raccoon as being sweet and cuddly.

The second element in your books that has helped me with my writing is learning the importance of using vivid vocabulary. For example, in my memoir, "Peaches", I described my pet raccoon's eyes by writing, "Her glowing green eyes make her look like a spy in the night." When I read *A Ride with Huey the Engineer*, you made me feel excited like Sunny must have felt. I even thought I could smell the freshly baked pie Sunny took Huey. I felt like I was on the train. After reading this book, I wish I could have ridden with Huey and Sunny. Since I have read stories with vivid vocabulary, I see how important it is to include more appealing vocabulary when I write. I want my reader to see the picture I am trying to paint, as well as, enjoy reading my stories.

sustains appropriate tone throughout reflection

strong awareness of audience needs

reflection

specific thorough support insight

reflection

specific thorough support

reflection

analysis

insight

evaluates personal progress throughout

connects to literacy

describes own literacy strategies

analyzes own areas of growth

Another way my writing has improved is by seeing your use of dialogue in your books. The reason dialogue makes your books intriguing is because I know who is talking and what they are saying. I like to hear someone read stories aloud with dialogue; because the reader can change his/her voice to imitate the characters. For instance, in your book *The Rightful Owner*, there are many conversations between the characters. In my memoir, "Peaches", I used dialogue when I wrote, "Look what I have!" to show the reader my dad's excitement when he brought a baby raccoon home. I used this dialogue so my readers would know exactly how my dad felt and feel like they were a part of my story.

My teacher has told our class that the more we read the better we will write. I didn't know what she meant at first, but now, I see that by reading admirable examples of outstanding writing, I have learned to write admirably. I used to be a good writer, but now I'm a fantastic writer. I try to use the elements of "hooking" the reader with dialogue, vivid vocabulary, and captivating leads. Thank you for sharing your writing talent with me.

Sincerely,

A Fan of Your Writing

Instructional Implications:

The writing was organized logically and coherently, but in order for the student to organize the piece in a way to enhance the purpose, instruction should be focused on careful or subtle organization. Using a variety or subtle transitions can help develop this as well. There was also a control and a variety of sentences, but in order to enhance the meaning, instruction should focus on using more complex sentences.

Me, Myself, and I

I once heard a quote, which said, "See things as they are and write about them. Don't waste your creative energy trying to make things up. Even if you are writing fiction, write the things you see and know." This quote is the foundation of my purpose for writing. Many people like to write fairytales, long suspenseful stories, or regular fiction. Not me. I am the kind of writer who enjoys writing about real-world issues and dilemmas in an average teenager's life. Not until middle school did I ever feel like this is the direction of writing I was interested in.

During elementary school, I thought that more people enjoyed reading stories about fictional plots and characters. I think it was because I liked to read about those stories the most. I enjoyed stories that took me into another world. One example of a popular series that I liked to read was the Harry Potter series. Whenever I had an opportunity to journey into the world of magic, I was right there reading. So in fourth grade, I started writing stories that I would make up off the top of my head. However, when I would reread the story from beginning to end, it wouldn't make a lot of sense. When it was time to revise, I had to make many changes. In the end, my fantasy pieces came out rather well, but not up to my expectations. However, my interests in genre changed once I began my writing for middle school.

Once I transferred to C.V.M.S, I realized that there are many problems our country and world face daily, and many of them involving teens. I soon took an interest in writing about them. For example, my article, "The Deadly Attempt," is about teenagers who committed, or are thinking about, suicide. I chose this topic because although many people know about it, no one will stand up and address the issue. We hear about teenagers killing themselves so often that many people just brush it off. I felt that it was time to take action and bring up the subject for others to see. However, there was one problem with this piece.

It seems that ever since I began writing non-fiction pieces, I have always seemed to struggle with putting emotion into my pieces. In fourth grade, my memoir was about my mom. Until my teacher and I sat down and conferenced about it, there weren't many feelings expressed. It seemed as though my audience wouldn't be able to feel sadness, happiness, or any input of emotion in it. When the final copy was complete and my mom read it, she cried. In a way, I felt like I had accomplished a goal when those tears came sweeping down her face.

This year when I wrote "The Deadly Attempt," I made sure to add emotion to the revised piece. I told a story I found on the internet of a boy who seemed to have the perfect life, and then one day they found him behind a church with a self-inflicted gunshot wound. As I told this story, I could feel the sadness pouring over me, and the grief I had for his family. My purpose to write about such grief was to be able to allow my audience to really have an impact so that they will want participate in an action against suicide.

What inspired me to write such serious pieces, you may be asking? I would have to give credit to two very famous authors, Mitch Albom and Lurlene McDaniel. Mitch Albom has to be the author I am inspired by the most. In his book, Tuesdays With Morrie, he captures the emotion and reality of his old college professor, Morrie, as he is dying from Lou Gehrig's disease. In this dramatic book, I felt many different emotions. I think this is why I am so intrigued by this author and his books. I feel that if I put feelings into my writing, then people will remember what I wrote.

I also enjoy the One Last Wish Foundation series by Lurlene McDaniel. Her books are based on teenagers who are experiencing or are in a relationship with someone who has a disease or waiting for a transplant. They are full of dramatic elements and well as romantic scenes, with the main characters being teenagers. McDaniel inspires me most with the passion and love the characters develop. Even though I usually don't write about romance, this still inspires me to develop the characters so my audience is able to feel like they know each individual as if they are their own friend.

Overall, I am impressed with my writing as a seventh grader. Of course, I know that there is always room for improvement. Whether I am writing pieces about fantasies or nonfiction, I know I will give it my all. When I compare my pieces from fourth grade and this year, I understand how different my writing personality is, and I can definitely be able to take advantage of that in the future. Whether I become a famous author or I am just writing for a local newspaper, I

know that I can keep my audience attentive. I realize that no matter how much I change throughout the years, I will always be me. Forever and always, me.

Grade 7 - Annotated
only for content

Me, Myself, and I

title hints
at self reflection

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attempts
to narrow
purpose
(focus)

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reflection

literacy
connections

supports
the purpose

analysis of
strategy as
a writer

reflection
about needs
as a writer

awareness
of audience's
needs

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claim about self as a writer

audience awareness

voice

reflection about writing (area of growth)

describes process in writing

reflection

details helps audience understand

describes a strategy used to develop writing

^{write}
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^{reflection about a decision made about writing}

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Whether I become a famous author or I am just writing for a local newspaper, I

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change throughout the years, I will always be me. Forever and always, me.

reflection

connection to
purpose

Instructional Notes: This writing establishes and maintains the purpose of evaluating personal progress in writing throughout the piece. The literacy connection is noted in various parts of the writing with the references to different books and authors. This connection is used as support of claims about strategies and techniques used by the writer.

Dear Mom,

Thanks for the dirt bike magazines that you have been buying me for the last two months. It's not that I'm not a good reader I make good grades in English but I find I find what I read in school boring. Dirt bike magazines are the only thing that actually gets my attention when I read. Remember you had to buy me a new clutch lever, brake levers, and grip handles from www.motosport.com, when I wrecked my dirt bike. That's when you started buying me motosport magazines. The magazines I have been getting in the mail have really helped me learn about dirt bikes and how they work. You would probably be surprised that these magazines have even helped me with my writing at school. For example, when I wrote my short story it made it easier to write by helping me sound like I knew what I was talking about – like knowing the name of the bikes. My story is about two pro semi-pro dirt bike riders who go pro in freestyle.

Also, do you remember when I had to persuade you and dad to buy me a dirt bike? I had to do something similar in social studies when I had to write an editorial trying to persuade people to donate money to monsoon victims of India. Just like I had to give you reasons to buy me a dirt bike I had to give reasons why people should donate money to India.

My writing has improved a lot since last year. One way that my writing has got better is because now I am writing more complete sentences. I also understand the questions better so I answer them more thoroughly. So since dirt bikes have helped me so much with my writing would you consider buying me a new one.

Sincerely,

your son

Grade 7 - Annotated only
for content

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Instructional Notes:

This writing attempts writing about growth in writing. The focus is authentic and meaningful to the writer. A narrow attempt at a literacy connection is evident, but not fully explained or supported.

Sincerely,

your son

audience awareness (details)

audience of reflection

literacy connection that supports writing growth

describes area of growth in writing

reflection connects learning to writing

claim about growth is not supported

voice

The Talk With Mrs. M

I never thought I would be a good writer. From second grade to third I wasn't writing very good pieces. I was struggling with my pieces, until the talk with my second grade teacher, Mrs. M. And I learned, if I could write what I want; I would be a better writer.

That day, I saw Mrs. M. Mrs. M. would always help me with any problem I came to her with, including my writing dilemma of not writing good pieces. I was walking in the halls of J. Elementary School, when I saw her. We started to talk and I asked her about my writing problem. She paused for a moment to think. And she said, "Write a story about anything you want and turn it into me in a few days." This puzzled me but I agreed. I went home and went to work on the piece. I was astounded, my fingers glided over the keyboard. My ideas rushed out of my head and went onto the computer screen.

After I was finished writing for the day, the piece was about three pages long, and I knew that I had written what I wanted. I was very excited to show Mrs. M. my progress. When I got back to school the next day, I saw her and approached her with confidence and told her about my progressing piece, but I wasn't finished yet.

I came home that night to some curious parents, and they were wondering why I had been on the computer the night before. I told them about the three page long piece and told me to print out a copy for them to read. So I trotted down the stairs and printed another copy. While I was walking back up the stairs, I became nervous. Would they like it? Would they hate it? Or would they think I am stupid? All were questions about to be answered, and I handed them the piece. There were a few moments of silence, and then my dad looked up. He said "Well, hmmm." There was another pause, "It's good but it could use some improvement," he said.

Then my mom jumped in, "It's very good!" she exclaimed. But I wasn't sure of her real opinion, because she always says she likes things I do, but I know that she is my mom and she would say things like that.

"Well, it is not finished yet," I stated. So I knew my parents liked it (sort of) but what would Mrs. M. think?

The next day, I was anxious but nervous at the same time to see her, and I knew she would like my piece that I wrote and what I wanted to write. I looked for her in her classroom, she wasn't there, and I checked the cafeteria, no Mrs. M. I wondered to myself, where was she, that whole day I didn't see her, "Well I guess I will see her tomorrow," I reassured myself. The next day was the same result, no Mrs. M. any

were! I was going to get to the bottom of this. I asked a teacher about the whereabouts of Mrs. M . I approached him and asked "Do you know where Mrs. M is?"

"Oh, she is sick," the bulky man answered.

"Well, do you know when she will be back?" I questioned.

"I'm not sure, but I think she will be back on Monday." So I waited the long weekend out and it was back to school.

On Monday, I saw her and the man was right, she was back. At this point I was done with the piece and it turned out to be five pages long. I handed her the five page long piece, but she couldn't read it there and then because she had a class. She told me to come back to her on Friday.

"Friday!" I shrieked (in my mind), "I will never be able to wait that long!" But I had to, three days of complete torture. It was only Tuesday and it took so loooong for that bell to ring. It was the same way for Wednesday, Thursday, and Fri- Finally It is here!! It looked like I was running from a serial killer; I went so fast to meet Mrs. M . I saw her, and it looked like she was waiting for me.

I calmly walked up to her and she handed back my piece that I worked so hard on. I shut my eyes to increase the anticipation. My five long page story was in my hand, graded. I slowly opened my eyes, and I saw, THERE WAS NO GRADE ON IT!!! At that point, I was very shocked and surprised. But Mrs. M said "I thought it was one of the best pieces I have ever read. The reason I didn't put a grade on it is because there was no need to." I was totally dumbfounded! But she continued "This piece is great, but it doesn't matter what I think, it's all about what you think about it. Grades are just grades and it's better to like your piece than the grade." After that speech, I finally understood what she was trying to teach me.

I might have been a little hurt, but I really learned something. I realized that grades aren't everything; what's more important is that you like the piece you are writing. Sometimes, when the teacher tells me to change something on my piece that I like, I just keep it my way. Without this experience, I would have never been the writer I am today. What I have learned is that I am a better writer when I can write what I want.

The Talk With Mrs. M

focus of
writing

Literacy
connections (writing)

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reflection
to purpose

idea
development
(narrative)

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reference
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evidence
of voice

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Narration
explains the
writing
process used
by the
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Instructional Notes:

This writing establishes and maintains the purpose of evaluating growth in writing through the theme, "I am a better writer when I can write what I want." The focus of the writing is the strong influence of a teacher. The writing strand is the literacy connection.

narration provides details about the anticipated writing conference

background information (audience needs)

claims about growth as a writer

subtle reference to growth as a writer

insightful conclusion

focused purpose (theme) throughout the writing

Grade 12 Reflective Sample

"A Tale of Two Towers: Reflections on Writing"

For some high school students, writing is a painful process drawn out by (what they believe to be) multiple unnecessary drafts, erratic revisions, and critiques that go unheard. When I began to take writing seriously and focus on the quality of my writing rather than simply writing to complete an assignment, I realized that being conditioned to write, read, and revise each piece that I had written did nothing but build on and improve my writings. These processes only contributed to writing that was structurally sound; it didn't benefit the actual content of my writing. This is why my growth as a writer isn't best described through the various school related tasks that have been assigned to me. The development of my writing proficiency and my attitude towards it is most evident in my personal writing endeavors, those that have been read by none but endlessly amended by me at any opportunity.

My interest and progression as a writer starts with my inspiration. While other kids were being lulled to sleep with classic fairy tales, I was being read comic books. Instead of watching *Cinderella*, I watched *Star Wars*, and I knew who Frodo Baggins was before I could recognize Mickey Mouse. Knowing this, it should come as no surprise to learn that the majority of my personal writing – writing that isn't for a class – is filled with fantasy and science fiction elements.

At first, I went down the oft-traveled path of fantasy writers. It was fifth grade, I had recently read Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and in my mind, that qualified me to begin writing my own fantasy epic. Without any preliminary thoughts, I began writing and in only a few hours completed what I believed to be, as I was writing at least, an impressive first try. My hopes were shattered as I read it through the first time. Not only had I stolen the basis of Tolkien's masterpiece (My tale narrated the adventure of a diverse group of fantasy races who aligned to destroy a Holy Grail-esque necklace that granted the owner unlimited power), but I had also taken the names of locales directly from his maps. Even in my fifth grade mindset, it was painfully obvious to me that, if I wanted to follow through with my interest and not simply write a blatant *Rings* knock-off, I would have to succeed where other author's have failed: creating an original fantasy story that, even if the shadow of Tolkien's overpowering influence could be recognized, would distinguish itself from the classic standard.

It soon became clear that this was no easy task. In fact, it seemed nearly impossible. Throughout middle school, I penned numerous stories, each leaving me with the same feeling. The correctness was there, it always had been, but the

revolutionary content (I would have settled for groundbreaking or innovative, even) was still notably absent. Any idea that came to mind could easily be traced to something made popular by Tolkien. I had no qualms with using the fantasy staples (elves, orcs, dwarves, a hero's journey, etc.) but a new twist on them is what I lacked. This was heartbreaking for me; I truly desired to write something creative and original. I tried more, and I continued to fail. This failure did not prompt me to quit, though, only to try harder.

I'm still trying. I have two binders, nearing three, of content that has accumulated over the past four years, whether it be a hastily written idea or a scribbled drawing. I won't discard anything that may be of use later. If poetic justice were served, I would like to find some closure in my final year in high school, and reach the goal of writing to my own satisfaction. I've managed to write a few short stories with fantasy elements, but I'm still searching for the idea that blows me away. It is these failed attempts and efforts that have furthered my development as a writer. It hasn't been the analysis of writing mechanics, underlining parts of speech, or any other tedious task performed in a standard English class. That helps, but not nearly as much as doing things on my own.

I know how to write. I am sure there are more technicalities that I will learn as my education continues, but as of now I am content with my writing level. It is not the **how** that I am concerned with. It is the **what** that I focus on. As I continue to hone my writing, I am sure that I will continue to come closer to writing something that ultimately satisfies me. Until then, I'll keep trying.

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Writing shows insight about students' own experience with writing

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focuses on writing growth / development

My interest and progression as a writer starts with my inspiration. While other kids were being lulled to sleep with classic fairy tales, I was being read comic

reflects upon early literacy experiences with comic books and S. Wars to show connections to fantasy writing

books. Instead of watching *Cinderella*, I watched *Star Wars*, and I knew who Frodo Baggins was before I could recognize Mickey Mouse. Knowing this, it should come as no surprise to learn that the majority of my personal writing - writing that isn't for a class - is filled with fantasy and science fiction elements.

At first, I went down the oft-traveled path of fantasy writers. It was fifth grade, I had recently read Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*, and in my mind, that qualified me to begin writing my own fantasy epic. Without any preliminary thoughts, I began writing and in only a few hours completed what I believed to be, as I was writing at least, an impressive first try. My hopes were shattered as I read it through the first time. Not only had I stolen the basis of Tolkien's masterpiece (My tale narrated the adventure of a diverse group of fantasy races who aligned to destroy a Holy Grail-esque necklace that granted the owner unlimited power), but I had also taken the names of locales directly from his maps. Even in my fifth grade mindset, it was painfully obvious to me that, if I wanted to follow through with my interest and not simply write a blatant *Rings* knock-off, I would have to succeed where other authors have failed: creating an original fantasy story that, even if the shadow of Tolkien's overpowering influence could be recognized, would distinguish itself from the classic standard.

shows insight about writing through reflection

It soon became clear that this was no easy task. In fact, it seemed nearly impossible. Throughout middle school, I penned numerous stories, each leaving me with the same feeling. The correctness was there, it always had been, but the

subtle, effective transitions maintains insight into literacy experience

evaluates personal experience growth

maintains distinctive voice

revolutionary content (I would have settled for groundbreaking or innovative, even) was still notably absent. Any idea that came to mind could easily be traced to something made popular by Tolkien. I had no qualms with using the fantasy staples (elves, orcs, dwarves, a hero's journey, etc.) but a new twist on them is what I lacked. This was heartbreaking for me; I truly desired to write something creative and original. I tried more, and I continued to fail. This failure did not prompt me to quit, though, only to try harder.

writing demonstrates effective transitions throughout

I'm still trying. I have two binders, nearing three, of content that has accumulated over the past four years, whether it be a hastily written idea or a scribbled drawing. I won't discard anything that may be of use later. If poetic justice were served, I would like to find some closure in my final year in high school, and reach the goal of writing to my own satisfaction. I've managed to write a few short stories with fantasy elements, but I'm still searching for the idea that blows me away. It is these failed attempts and efforts that have furthered my development as a writer. It hasn't been the analysis of writing mechanics, underlining parts of speech, or any other tedious task performed in a standard English class. That helps, but not nearly as much as doing things on my own.

considers a personal goal in literacy

I know how to write. I am sure there are more technicalities that I will learn as my education continues, but as of now I am content with my writing level. It is not the **how** that I am concerned with. It is the **what** that I focus on. As I continue to hone my writing, I am sure that I will continue to come closer to writing something that ultimately satisfies me. Until then, I'll keep trying.

demonstrates insight and analysis

Instructional Notes: This personal essay demonstrates an effective evaluation and reflection upon writing growth through early experiences with reading. While the student has demonstrated an experience common to many writers (the reading/writing connection), the focus is unique to the student and does not seem forced or prompt-driven. It is evident throughout the essay that the student was given clear choice and ownership related to the intended purpose of the reflective entry for portfolio assessment.

maintains focus on growth in writing through literacy throughout

Grade 12 Reflective Sample

Following the Yellow Brick Road to Literacy

As a child, I spent my summer days at my grandparents' house with my sister and two cousins. We spent countless hours playing together in the basement. We made up companies that we worked for, put on dance recitals, taught imaginary classes our vast knowledge, just about anything that you could imagine four kids coming up with. But one particular summer, our jobs at imagined companies and pretend teaching became old. When boredom finally took over, we needed something new to do. It was then that we came up with the idea of putting on a play.

Looking back on those years, it was our first production, *The Wizard of Oz*, that has left the most lasting impression. I was too young to realize it then, but the experience of writing our own play and producing it ourselves corresponds to the process of writing that I currently use today.

We went through four phases when developing our version of *The Wizard of Oz*. These stages were choosing an audience, planning, practicing, and the final production. These stages all relate to a certain phase in my current writing process.

Stage 1: Choosing an Audience

As aspiring playwrights, we knew it was important to select an audience. Considering all we knew was family, that was our audience. But, not only did we have to choose who we wanted to develop the play for, we also had to sell tickets to them. We had to advertise the play, and really make it seem interesting. These two steps are similar to what I did when developing my portfolio. I first had to choose an audience for each of my pieces. After choosing who my reader was, I had to sell them my paper. I have learned that you **MUST** get your audience interested immediately. Having an awareness of my audience allowed me to develop my introductions in each of my pieces to really draw in their attention and sell my piece.

When writing "The Belief of a Scanner/Shredder Girl," I had a very unusual audience to consider. This piece was written for an essay contest titled "This I Believe." If my piece was chosen, it would be read on a radio program. This was a hard audience to write for because it was important that I not only focus on the writing, but how it would be read as well. I worked to make this piece conversational. I wanted it to sound as if I were saying it myself, not like it was being read straight off of a piece of paper. I also had to keep in mind that I not only had to express my belief, but I had to do so with only six-hundred words. With this restriction, it was very important that I kept my piece concise. I had to limit the detail, and through that, I realized that if you use the right language, you really don't need as many words.

One piece which I feel I strongly sold to my readers is "Teen Smoking: Out of Control." I decided that this piece would be best developed as an article in a parenting magazine. When I knew that my readers would be parents of teenagers, it was easy for me to focus on audience awareness. I was able to develop my paper about teenage smoking into an article to help parents dealing with this issue. Once I had chosen my audience, I developed my introduction to draw their attention by using the statement "teenagers have always been classified by elders as the immature, unmanageable youngsters." When I read this, I can envision my grandfather talking about teenagers these days compared to when he was growing up. I knew this would be a similar image for many other readers. By making this statement, I hoped readers would immediately have an image of someone they knew classifying teenagers in the same way. From this, I was able to lead into some of the bad habits teens take part in and introduce smoking as one popular habit.

Stage 2: Planning

Back at our playhouse in the basement, it was time to start planning. We spent hours watching *The Wizard of Oz* to be inspired for our writing. We wrote our lines based on what happens in the movie. After we had our lines down, we had to plot the action of the play. We outlined what needed to happen in our version. Once we had completed the outline, we began to write the actual play. We correlated our lines with the action. After weeks of work, we completed writing the play.

The tedious planning we used to develop our version of *The Wizard of Oz* is also an important part of the writing process that I use. I take time in developing outlines that I use when writing my pieces. When writing my Internet book review on *For One More Day*, I started with a simple outline:

1. Introduce story
2. Structure of novel
3. How the novel reads (quick read)
4. Segmenting novel with flashbacks
5. Conversational tone of the novel
6. How title correlates to the theme
7. Conclusion with personal touch

To set up my outline I first had to decide what I wanted to review about the novel. I chose the important features of the novel that made it such a great choice to read. Then, once I knew what I needed to include, I arranged my outline order into a logical sense that would allow my piece to flow. After creating this outline, I was able to write my review with more focus.

Stage 3: Practice

Back at our summer production, we finally completed the writing of our play and it was time for practice. We knew that the more we practiced, the better our play would be. Practice makes perfect, right? We practiced at least four or five times the week before we put on the play. On certain days we dressed up in our costumes to make sure everything was just right. As we practiced, we found a few minor errors in our writing or our props that needed some work. We finally made all the changes we needed to, and had our well-tuned play ready for production.

Practice is one of the most important steps in my writing process. Practice is probably better known as revising in the writing process. With my portfolio, I found revising to be one of the hardest, but most rewarding phases. When revising *The Beliefs of a Scanner/Shredder Girl*, it was difficult to know what needed to be done. That was when I opted to find some help. As a writer, hearing others' opinions on my writing always gives me new perspective. In English class this year, we had the option of editing one of our pieces with help from the entire class. I decided that this was what *The Beliefs of a Scanner/Shredder Girl* needed. We used one of the new projectors to project my paper onto a screen. When I read my piece to the class, each student would give suggestions. I found that this was one of the most helpful forms of revision I had ever used.

Stage 4: The Final Production

Back at our grandparents' house, it was finally performance day. We had put a lot of work into our play, and were immensely excited for the production. Our last challenge was to make our play presentable. We worked hard to set up our grandparents' basement for our play. We set up seats, curtains, lighting, a back stage, the whole nine yards. This was it. No more dress rehearsals. No more changes. It was time for full costumes. We performed perfectly, without one mistake. Our production was a success. All of our planning and practice paid off. Our audience was pleased.

Like the final production of our play, with writing, the final production is key. As my portfolio writing was coming to a close, I began to prepare my pieces for their presentation. I set up two of my pieces using Microsoft Publisher. Since "Teen Smoking: Out of Control" was a magazine article, I made it look as if it were in a magazine. Since my book review on *For One More Day* was an Internet book review, I made it look as if I had printed it straight off of a website. I read each of my papers once more to look for last second mistakes. After changing any mistakes I found, I printed each of my papers. My portfolio was complete.

Throughout the experience of creating a portfolio, the most important thing that I have come to realize is that I have truly grown as a writer. From

the stages of choosing an audience, planning, practicing, and putting on the final production, my writing process has only strengthened through four short years of being in high school. I have a new confidence in my writing. It was an amazing feeling when I realized that with hard work, my writing was something that I could be proud of.

Grade 12 Reflective Sample

Following the Yellow Brick Road to Literacy

Title suggests focus

As a child, I spent my summer days at my grandparents' house with my sister and two cousins. We spent countless hours playing together in the basement. We made up companies that we worked for, put on dance recitals, taught imaginary classes our vast knowledge, just about anything that you could imagine four kids coming up with. But one particular summer, our jobs at imagined companies and pretend teaching became old. When boredom finally took over, we needed something new to do. It was then that we came up with the idea of putting on a play.

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We went through four phases when developing our version of *The Wizard of Oz*. These stages were choosing an audience, planning, practicing, and the final production. These stages all relate to a certain phase in my current writing process.

focuses on early literacy experience and connects with writing development

"Stages" of experience help organization

Stage 1: Choosing an Audience

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writing and performing plays = literacy experiences/strands

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Develops ideas by connecting experience with writing

References samples from portfolio

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Reflective
idea
development
demonstrate
thinking
about writing
decisions

Stage 2: Planning

continued
weaving
connections

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describes
own
process
for
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Instructional Notes: This sample clearly demonstrates the connections between literacy experiences and writing growth and development. The student has demonstrated the influence of early literacy experiences (writing and performing plays) to current writing development (portfolio development). This sample is unique to the student's experience suggesting choice and ownership during the writing process.